

# Ham radio: a family affair

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MENASHA — When the "ham radio bug" bit at the Jerry Sobieszczyk home it caused a nice kind of epidemic that led to all five members of the family studying for, and obtaining, their novice licenses.

And this may be just a first step, according to Sandy, who, with her husband is planning to drive to Milwaukee just before Christmas Day to take tests for technical licenses.

The family had a citizen band radio and found it "tickled" their interest in radio. Friends, Helen and Bob Borree, ham operators, told the family about their radio experiences and the group was really "hooked," according to Sandy.

Through the Borrees, the Sobieszczyks made contact with Charles and Ruth Banks, who are licensed by the Federal Communications Commission to teach those wanting to obtain novice licenses.

After being told what was required to obtain a license by the Banks, Sandy said she had "second thoughts" about whether the family should tackle the job of learning.

The family, Shawn, 15, Joe, 12, and Michele, 11, agreed that they were willing to try to learn the International Code and theories of radio, along with other information necessary for making contacts with other ham radio operators, and embark on what was to be their new hobby.

Since that time last spring, classes and practice have taken a great deal of time in the Sobieszczyk's scheduling. But, they claim there have been some great rewards, such as sharing a hobby, the excitement of waiting out test results and actual contacts made with other operators.

The ham radio hobby is ideal for their family, said Sandy, for a number of reasons. It is great during the winter when even snowmobiling can be prohibited by bitter cold, sudden thaws and the like.

Radio knows no season.

It is a hobby that can be shared by a number of people and is probably more fun that way, she says. Occasionally, Sandy and Jerry help Joe, a seventh grade student at James Madison Junior High School, Appleton, to catch transmissions that come in rapidly.

The family receives and sends messages in International Code, as required by their present licenses. If they

continue to study, learn and earn other licenses, such as general, advanced and extra, they would be able to "talk" through microphones or telephone devices.

"But that would be like talking on the telephone," said Sandy, and added that it is the general consensus of the family that the code is "something special."

A good operator can "hear" the message as it is received without writing down the letter characters.

For Michele, a sixth grade student, and Shawn, who is in high school, the hobby has also been fun and interesting. Shawn, who was seriously burned as a child and has had to undergo many operations and skin grafts, was hospitalized when the family became interested in learning ham radio operation but was able to keep up with the family because of the mobility of the learning process and he could practice while recuperating.

To practice, students can listen to transmissions broadcasted four times each day on a "learning station." The transmissions are at various speeds.

Ham radio operation can be as economical or expensive as one chooses it to be, according to Sandy. A beginner may purchase used equipment and then "branch out" as they wish, she said.

One reason that Sandy and Jerry are especially interested in obtaining a technical license is that they are looking forward to using the knowledge learned to fix up and operate a new used "rig" in their home.

You learn a lot that you may use only once, or perhaps never, said Sandy, but it still must be proved, by tests, that you have that knowledge. The tests have become more difficult during the past years as interest in ham radio has increased tremendously, she said.

The family applied for licenses at different times and they were delayed through some mishap, said Sandy. However, the family has five licenses almost in numerical order from WD9GTO to WD9GTT. The letter "R" is missing.

"Maybe the one issuing the licenses left for a coffee break," said Sandy. The missing letter has been a "fun thing" for the family to think about, even though they do wish they would have had all of the call letters in order. Once issued, the licenses cannot be changed. They must, however, be renewed regularly, according to FCC rules.

There are a lot of rules set by the FCC, said Sandy, including teacher requirements. The older Sobieszczyks studied with Warren Krueger for their technical licenses, as he is licensed to teach at that level.

The family belongs to the Neenah-Menasha Amateur Radio Club. Club members seldom use the ham radios to contact each other, said Sandy, "they're too close."

Sandy has been especially delighted with making contact with a family in Upstate New York and she and they have exchanged letters.

The hobby has been so fascinating, said Sandy, that she is "way behind in my sewing." An evening can just disappear, time-wise, when one gets "into" making contacts, she said.



**A family interest**

All five members of the Sobieszczyk family of rural Menasha recently earned novice amateur radio operator licenses and enjoy the hobby together. They are, from left,

Shawn, Joe, Michele, Sandy and Jerry. Sandy and Jerry, the parents, hope to take tests for a technical license before Christmas. (News-Record photo)